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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, NEA/IPA, AND NEA/FO  
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNESCO](#) [IS](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: STRIDENT GOJ LANGUAGE WITH U.S. ON MUGHRABI GATE,  
BUT IS ISRAEL HEARING IT?

REF: A. 08 AMMAN 3389  
[1](#)B. 08 AMMAN 2965

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: While Jordanian fears that Israel will unilaterally rebuild the Mughrabi Gate ascent to the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif have cropped up periodically since the original ramp was damaged by heavy rains in 2004, over the past year the matter has been raised in increasingly strident ways by ever more senior Jordanian officials with progressively higher-level U.S. officials. Mughrabi Gate has intruded on Special Envoy George Mitchell's discussions about the peace process, Acting Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman's consultations with the GOJ over Syria engagement, and has seen Ambassador and other members of the P5 convoked by the Foreign Ministry. There is reason to believe that Jordan may use less sharp language when broaching the subject directly with Israeli officials. End Summary.

Israel Seen Violating Precedent and Treaties  
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[1](#)2. (C) GOJ officials repeatedly have told us that Jordan will reject any Israeli design for a new ascent and complained that Israel is not allowing Jordanian technical experts unfettered access to the site to take measurements to finalize their own design. Jordan considers the Mughrabi Gate and its ramp access integral to Muslim Waqf land and therefore part of Jordan's historical patrimony. They believe the historical status quo has been officially recognized by Israel in Article 9 of the 1994 Wadi Araba peace treaty that says: "Each Party will provide freedom of access to places of religious and historical significance. In this regard, in accordance with the Washington Declaration, Israel respects the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan in Muslim Holy shrines in Jerusalem." (Note: The Washington Declaration, the non-belligerency agreement signed on July 25, 1994, used the same language in calling on Israel to respect Jordan's special role in protecting the Muslim shrines. End Note)

Hashemite Legitimacy Tied to Role As Custodian of Holy Sites  
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[1](#)3. (S) King Abdullah, the last two Foreign Ministers, Religious and Cultural Affairs Advisor Prince Ghazi, and senior Royal Court figures all insist that His Majesty cannot be seen to abdicate his custodial role over the Holy Sites. This role is taken on behalf of the entire Muslim community, and thus the King and his advisors fear regional and domestic questions about his legitimacy were he to back down. In all of the following, Jordanian language is quite blunt:

- The King told Senator Mitchell on February 28 that the Hashemites had very clear and serious historical responsibilities to protect and care for the holy places in Jerusalem, which was reinforced in the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace agreement. Israel had long recognized and respected Jordan's role but was now trying to bypass it. If Israel persisted, Jordan would fully defend its role and be vocal while doing so. The King stressed that he could not and would not back down from carrying out his obligations and would be "more Catholic than the Pope" on the matter to fend off extremists who hope Jordan would fail to protect the holy places. If he did not, extremists would be able to accuse the King of abdicating his role and argue for his ouster. The King asserted that "We don't want Israel and the U.S. to be surprised when it blows up in their faces."

- During Assistant Secretary Feltman's visit on March 5, the King's Media Advisor Ayman Al-Safadi doubted a potentially isolated right-wing Israeli government would be so desperate for friends that it would avoid rupturing Jordan ties, saying, "We simply cannot budge on this, and if we have a confrontation on this it will spill over to other issues where we could have a constructive role."

- In a February 21 conversation with a visiting Senate staff member, Royal Court Director for International Affairs Jafar Al-Hassan said Mughrabi Gate would put Jordan's relationship with Israel "on the line," adding that Jordan would never allow the Israelis to go ahead with their design. At any moment, a rightist Israeli government could put armored personnel vehicles on the ascent, Hassan said. "People will blame Jordan. We will not let Israel put us on the line."

- Prince Ghazi - who in his role as Religious and Cultural Affairs Advisor to the King is particularly engaged on the Mughrabi Gate issue - has often proved quite emotional, at one point warning Ambassador that "this is not only destabilizing, it is delegitimizing."

#### GOJ Wants U.S. To Carry The Water With Israel

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14. (S) Ambassador and visiting Washington officials repeatedly have urged top-level GOJ interlocutors to seek a bilateral solution with Israel and to make as clear to Israel as to the U.S. the gravity of their concerns. Ambassador passed to Israel's Ambassador in Amman the latest Jordanian views, particularly as articulated by the King to Senator Mitchell that "we will fully defend our rights and responsibilities and will be vocal about it. We don't want Israel and the U.S. to be surprised when it blows up in their faces." On March 12 PolOff broached the subject with MFA Policy Planner Omar Nahar who has been a GOJ pointman on the issue, asking whether Jordan had been as sharp in its language with Israel.

15. (C) According to Nahar, Jordan has made clear to Israel that it seeks unfettered access the future site to take precise measurements and that Jordan believes precedent and treaty grant it the right to design, build, and pay for the project. However, to his knowledge, the more blunt language about consequences has been largely reserved for discussions with U.S. officials. Nahar said he thought it inappropriate and possibly counterproductive to "use that kind of language with (Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi) Livni" - or Israeli figures in general - "because where I come from, my school of diplomacy is that you need to respect the other's sensitivities, to see the limitations and what kind of language to use." And he added that this was the advice he conveyed to his superiors.

16. (C) By contrast, Nahar explained that Jordan is "more comfortable... using that kind of language" with the U.S., "as a friend of Jordan who can have influence with Israel." He left it up to the U.S. to choose how it represented the gravity of Jordanian concerns to Israel. (Note: While it is

not fully apparent how plugged in Nahar remains on the Mughrabi Gate issue - particularly as the Royal Court has been weighing in with greater frequency with U.S. visitors - he has generally proved cautious about speaking beyond his knowledge brief in the past. Nahar served in Jordan's Embassy in Tel Aviv during the 1990s. End Note.)

Comment: Context Matters

¶7. (S) Jordan sees its status as keeper of the Waqf as a key deliverable in the peace treaty with Israel, particularly after King Hussein abandoned any claim to the West Bank in ¶1988. Israel's perceived disregard for Jordanian equities on Mughrabi Gate is seen here as disrespect for the Wadi Araba treaty itself. While senior GOJ officials and the political elite value the accord and maintain a strong, if quiet, security and intelligence relationship, Mughrabi Gate has been just one of several developments this past year that have negatively impacted the Jordan-Israel relationship - including a lack of visible progress on the Annapolis process; a widespread view that Israel continues to assert itself in Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories by building the separation barrier, expanding settlements, and restricting Palestinian movement; and the recent Gaza crisis that roiled the Jordanian street. Moreover, the GOJ is concerned that the Mughrabi Gate and other irritants to relations with Israel will worsen when Binyamin Netanyahu - hardly a Jordanian favorite and a man with a history of engaging in provocative activity in Jerusalem - becomes Prime Minister. End Comment.

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